

HORACE TRAUBEL

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MILDRED BAIN

for
John D. Phillips

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Sam Ingham

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HORACE TRAUBEL

“I do not stop at the germ—I go on to
the flower and fruit:

I do not stop at the impulse to sing: I go
on to the song: I sing:

Whether I say old things or new things
does not seem to matter,

But whether I say true things does matter a
good deal and all.”



PHOTOGRAPH BY ALLEN DREW COOK

HORACE TRAUBEL

MILDRED BAIN

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I

Traubel and Whitman

The first time I went to one of the Walt Whitman Fellowship Meetings, held in New York each May, it was with the outstanding thought in my mind that at last I was to come face to face with the man whose writings had done more for me even than Walt Whitman's. I was to see and know Horace Traubel.

A thing which I find particularly interesting about these informal meetings is their concrete evidence of the universality of Whitman's appeal. It is fine to see how various are the tastes and intellectual leanings of the crowd gathered to celebrate old Walt's birthday. Socialists, anarchists, communists, painters, poets, mechanics, laborers, business men, people of every shade of thought and from every avenue of life, are there, drawn together by the magnetism of a common love.

In the throng of men and women seated round the dinner table that night were many well-known people. Yet the man who spoke the least and last of all, the man who year after year has made these meetings possible, was the one about whom my

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thoughts were busiest. In the course of a few simple, unpremeditated remarks, Horace Traubel gave, as it seemed to me, the keynote to his own and to Whitman's philosophy. He said: "I've been wondering how it would be if sometime we'd come here and celebrate ourselves for a change and not even mention Walt's name!" That appeared to me to go to the root—to be the biggest sort of tribute to Whitman. It also helped me to understand something over which I had been puzzling. Could it be possible that the majority of these people who were readers and lovers of Whitman did not realize the full significance of Horace Traubel? They knew him, to be sure, as the intimate friend and biographer of his famous predecessor. They loved him as a man. But in his own capacity as poet, philosopher, prophet, I felt then and still feel that only a few there really understood the size of the man who quietly and devotedly arranges these simple annual commemorations. And what is true of this gathering is true of America and of the world at large. Horace Traubel has not yet come into his own. He stands very close to Walt Whitman, and that juxtaposition has misled some people—but not all. I myself first became aware of him through this remarkable partnership. The story of their friendship is immortally beautiful. Starting at the time when Traubel, as a youngster, used to stroll along beside the old man through Philadelphia and Camden streets, it continued until the latter's death in 1892.

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In his last years, when Whitman became completely invalided, Traubel served him in countless ways, with untiring devotion—cooperating in the publication of the final editions of his books, doing much of his correspondence and looking after his personal comfort. The old man often lovingly said: “Horace, you anticipate my every need.” It was natural after this for Whitman to appoint Traubel one of his literary executors. To this relationship we are indebted for perhaps the most monumental, unique, and, as one critic has said, the most truthful biography in the English language. With Walt Whitman in Camden is recognized as profoundly conclusive not only in America but by critics in England and on the Continent. Traubel is everywhere acknowledged even by people who otherwise ignore or discredit him to be unqualifiedly significant in this biographical capacity. It is wonderful that a young man of thirty should have had the judgment and foresight to realize the future value of those daily conversations, and to so record them while fresh in his mind that they could be published twenty years afterwards without alteration—and this, too, at a time when Whitman was the object of scorn and ridicule, and was far from being the world figure he is to-day. Traubel has been called the American Boswell. The first volume of *With Walt Whitman in Camden* appeared in 1906, the second in 1909. Mitchell Kennerley, who has recently taken over the series, is about to produce the third volume. Conse-

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quent volumes will be brought out each year until the story, which runs up to Whitman's death, is completed.

While Traubel's reputation as the supreme biographer of his friend, as "the more than Plato to the more than Socrates," has to be respected, I, together with an increasing number of students, am unwilling that it should stand in place of a recognition of his personal title to be considered independently as a major factor in the history of his time. The purpose of this brochure is to point out and justify such a contention.

II

Data

Horace Traubel was born in Camden, New Jersey, December 19th, 1858. His father was of Jewish, his mother was of Christian, origin. Traubel calls himself a half-breed. His father was so independent in character and thought that when but a mere boy in his teens he had a quarrel with his parents over religion and found it necessary to leave his home in Germany on account of it. A year or two later he sailed for America, landing in Philadelphia penniless and without friends. There he found work as a lithographer. Maurice Traubel was also a gifted painter, writer and musician, and for the rest of his life was one of the familiar figures of the Quaker City. He married Katherine Grunder, a Philadelphia girl, and seven children were born to them. Horace was the fifth child—a shy, pale, blue-eyed youngster, saying little and reading everything he could get his hands on. At twelve years of age he left school, and began to shift for himself, being in turn newsboy, errand boy, printers' devil, compositor, lithographer, newspaper man, factory pay-master, bank clerk. In 1902 we find him a free lance, devoting himself to

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the publication of *The Conservator* and to doing his other literary work.

From 1903 to 1907, he, Will Price and Hawley McLanahan edited a magazine called *The Artsman*. It was the organ of the Rose Valley Movement, a crafts experiment which proved unsuccessful. Traubel contributed short monographs on the practical arts and idealism. In 1891 he married Anne Montgomerie. Two children came of the union—Gertrude, now twenty years old, and Wallace, who died at the age of five years. They make their home in Camden, living in a very modest, simple way. Traubel has his office in Philadelphia. His *Chants Communal* was published by Small, Maynard and Company, Boston, in 1905. And a noble translation by O. E. Lessing appeared in Germany from the house of R. Piper & Company, München, in 1907. *Optimos*, which appeared in 1910, bore the imprint of B. W. Huebsch. *The Conservator* was started in 1890 and has been maintained up to the present through years of fierce struggle against financial adversity.

In the early days Traubel wrote many rhymed poems which were printed in papers and magazines. For three or four years in the eighties he did most of the editorial writings of the *Boston Commonwealth*, besides contributing miscellaneous literary stuff to the paper and acting as its Philadelphia correspondent. He was also for several years on the editorial staff of *Unity*, Chicago, the Western organ

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of liberal Unitarianism. He was the founder of the Contemporary Club in Philadelphia and one of the founders of Philadelphia's Ethical Society.

Traubel has been translated generously into the French and German. Two of the *Optimos* poems, for instance, have recently been put into German by Johannes Schlaf. The February issue of 1913 of *Die Lese*, Stuttgart, was dedicated to Traubel, and almost wholly given over to a presentation and appreciation of his work. Lessing's splendid tribute and Arthur Holitscher's estimate appear, and these, with three of the chants themselves, will no doubt greatly widen the circles of Traubel lovers in Germany. Several recent things from *The Conservator* have been done into French by Leon Bazalgette, the translator and biographer of Whitman. So his work is slowly becoming better known both here and abroad.

III

Personal pros and cons

If you were to meet Horace Traubel without knowing who he was you would instantly feel yourself to be in the presence of an unusual and powerful personality.

His appearance alone would tell you that. The short figure, the full throat, the noble, splendidly shaped head, the intensely alive mobile face with its large, eager, blue eyes, and lips determined and impetuous under the short moustache, the crowning glory of thick, loosely tossed white hair, all go to make up an individuality which is at once that of a radiant boy and of a supreme seer. He is always dressed in the simplest clothes. He wears a soft gray hat which he can fold up and stick in his pocket, a low collar with flowing tie, and goes without a vest or overcoat even in the coldest weather.

Everything about him is in keeping with his independent, freedom-loving nature. I suppose there are people who can, when they are with Traubel, realize that he is a writer—a great mystic whose poems are not yet fully comprehended by his age. But I must confess that I cannot. He is preeminent-

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ly human. The writer, the scholar, are completely lost in the man. The fact of his genius seems somehow a minor consideration when compared with the magnetism of his friendship.

You never knew anyone more sincere, direct and spontaneous. He is full of fun and humor, too, loving a joke, and is up to juvenile pranks and mischief. Joyous, lovable, sympathetic to a rare degree, it is no wonder he wins friends who cherish his good will above all things.

What impresses you most about his personality as you get to know him is his intense and vital passion for humanity. To be where people are, to share the joys and sorrows of the every-day man, to offer himself wherever there is human need—that you grow to learn is the dominant motive of his life. He gives the benefit of his wide experience and deep understanding to anyone who may draw on it.

It is interesting to observe that there is not the slightest hint of the professional writer about him. He does not use bookish words in talking. He does not refer to things he has read and you have not (though his reading has always been tremendous in its range). He does not quote his own poems. He is "a mere man among mere people," as he himself says. One of his chief delights is walking. He is untiring. He tells me of a Sunday tramp with some friends from Philadelphia to Bethlehem, "well on to sixty miles."

At night, often late into the night, he loafs about

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the streets. He prefers the simple things, the simple restaurants, the simple hotels, the simple people. He drinks buttermilk where other men drink whiskey. He never smokes. He swears. He says of himself: "I'm often hot in the collar when there's no use for it at all." A natural person always finds his way to Traubel's heart.

His capacity for friendship and comradeship is one of the most remarkable things about this remarkable man. He has an enormous correspondence, which he attends to personally, doing every bit of his writing by hand. Wherever he happens to be, whether in his office in Philadelphia, where he edits his monthly paper, *The Conservator*, or away from home, his letters form an important and never neglected part of the day's work—letters to people old and young, near and remote, all loved by him; letters bearing words of cheer; messages of love and encouragement such as only a great nature can dictate.

Children come in for a large share of his affection and time. Picture postals, little things found in the stores which will delight a child's heart, go to them; improvised verses, letters to sick youngsters—in these sweet, quiet ways he enters into the common life.

Somewhere in one of his poems he has said: "I have no gospel to preach: I just walk around and let my spirit loose in the crowd." And this is true. The people who expect or wish to hear

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Traubel talk about religion or philosophy are disappointed. That is not his way. He does not waste time arguing about God. Yet something far subtler which radiates from him inspires and uplifts those who come within his influence.

He has the widest tastes. He is a baseball fan. He likes what he calls the "circus operas." He can talk with you intimately about football and prize-fighting. Yet he is an insatiable lover of music. He never misses a symphony concert if he can help it. He is especially fond of the theater, many actors both famous and obscure being among his warm personal friends.

Traubel has little or no use for exceptions, for shining lights, for people who in any way think themselves different from or superior to the crowd. Wherever he is, whatever he is doing, he is himself—the immediate, nonchalant, freedom-loving man moved by spontaneous impulses. He has almost a horror of artificiality, of dressed-up superior things or people. In formal conventional gatherings he is naturally not at home. I have seen him sit through an evening of this sort without saying a word, which is certainly an unusual thing for him, for he is a prodigious talker when with congenial people or when aroused by some subject of interest. He can be and is fluent, vivid and stimulating to an uncommon degree.

In talking, as in everything else, with him the free play of the spirit is the thing. If he feels like talk-

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ing he talks. He refuses to be dragged into conversation or controversy. He is not always, though mostly, considerate of other people's feelings; but sometimes his intense and outspoken convictions and his incisive satire and wit are received as if some personal affront was intended. He is misunderstood, as such a nature is bound to be. His frankness is sometimes taken for defiance and his truthfulness for brutality. He is impatient, restless and often irritable. That energy which has lavished itself in such a tremendous flood of writing chafes under restraint. When he encounters some kinds of things in people he manifests an irritation which, while it looks ugly, is still only superficial. He is almost brutally aggressive in his attitude toward praise or blame. He says to me: "I don't care a damn either way." He probably means that to be taken esoterically. For he also says: "I don't write a word to please anybody else, but I am pleased when somebody else is pleased."

Traubel says to me with regard to his poverty: "It is up to me to take my medicine. I have no right to do unpopular things and expect the popular returns. If I want the prizes I should do the things for which the prizes are awarded." And he lives this theory out. He never complains or growls. He puts up no claim for himself by which to measure the world's gratitude. He says again: "The world don't want me; I understand that quite well. It don't want the thing I offer it. I don't give in to

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the world. I have already given in to myself: The world don't want me, but I want myself."

He does his work, happy in doing it, his one great hope being that he may have contributed something toward civilizing the human heart. To have the world sometime grasp his message, to feel himself understood, is the only pay such a man as he wants or would accept. In the face of such indifference, such ridicule, such misunderstanding, as would have broken the resolution of a lesser man, he has gone his way uttering sublime words of cheer and encouragement, and exhibiting an invariable and complete faith.

IV

Backgrounds

Let us first study the outspread vista and so get a clear background against which to place this novel figure in literature.

The old saying that time works wonders is indeed trite, yet in no case is it to be more pertinently repeated than in judging a seer or prophet and his relation to his own country, period and ultimate world-place. In America, for instance, at the present day, the financial or political genius is the man who is most widely admired and welcomed. It is true we have our art world where original and splendid work is being done, but most of our critics spend their time almost exclusively lauding the work of the alien. "Distant pastures are always green." To some, the bare thought that artistic creation is achieved in this new world of skyscrapers and commercialism is absurd, if not entirely out of the question. But before he can appreciate a beautiful thing, there must be beauty in the eye of the beholder. And if, as it may happen, this beautiful thing be also strange, a departure from the accustomed standards, then an even more heroic attitude of soul is required for its apprehension.

The growth of the democratic spirit has affected

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life at many obvious points. We sometimes fail to realize the more subtle, more important, phenomena of this evolution. We see plainly enough how the democratic ideal, worked out in governments, is slowly but surely superseding the monarchial ideal. We see that the people in mass the whole world over are becoming roused to the sense of their communal power and responsibility. We see that traditional religious forms are being discarded and abandoned, not to the detriment of true worship, but for its sake. We see that laws and customs are undergoing a fierce fusillade of challenges and questions. We see that the economic and sex formulas, constituting the innermost stronghold of existing institutions, are being assailed by modernists who, having arrived at a higher conception of morality, refuse to be satisfied with any temporizing conclusions. The world is experiencing on every side a tremendous revolt. This unusual situation is revealed to us like a fresh landscape in which the immemorial elements of nature are assuming adventurous groupings and combinations.

Every student must acknowledge the presence of these vast transforming facts. It is imperative for him to recognize the part played by the poets, artists, philosophers—by all the avatars of the new spirit—who are to-day crystallizing in their work the ideals of the changing order. In every age interpreters and seers have served the world as revealers of life and its meanings. These men have never been under-

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stood or appreciated by their contemporaries. How could they be? The very fact that they see farther and voyage ahead of the rest, dooms them to loneliness and isolation. They are the pathfinders, the pioneers, the announcers and discoverers. And just in proportion as their journey into the invisible has been long or short will their popular recognition be delayed or imminent. Bergson has been recently heralded abroad and here in America as the exponent of a new philosophy. It is claimed for him that his point of view is revolutionary. Balfour wrote about him, whereupon he became the "fashionable philosopher" in England. I have referred to the noteworthy fact that we hastily acclaim such men when they are sighted abroad. How often it occurs that they suddenly appear, flash briefly across the intellectual sky, are eagerly greeted by the world, and then as suddenly vanish.

They lack the fundamentals. On the other hand, there are men who are like fixed stars in the immensity and permanency of their meanings. These are the slow arrivals. They stand still, are poised, revolve in their own cosmic orbit, until after often tragic postponements, they come into the focus of the world's understanding. They unceasingly labor, they unremittingly create, but for the time being they are unseen and unknown. Finally the time is ripe, and they are disclosed as the utterers of truths towards which the world has all the while been slowly advancing.

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In Horace Traubel, America has given to scripture and literature one of the forerunners. We are coming to see that in him we possess a great prophet of an illuminated, spiritualized social order. The spectacle of a man of genius who, for over twenty years, under discouraging auspices, has produced writings extraordinary in volume and quality, is perhaps not in itself unprecedentedly marvellous, but that he should have continued his fight steadily, almost without recognition, with a very limited audience, suggests that something very much out of the common must have been his motive and impulse.

V

As artist

I would like to emphasize the fact that Traubel's writings, belonging as they do to the new spirit, must be weighed and considered in the terms of the new spirit. They cannot be measured by the old standards—the accepted canons of art no more fit the writings of such creative men than the ideals and theories of the feudal system fit into the dreams of the Social Commonwealth. We must approach the writings of men like Traubel, Carpenter and Whitman with the truth clear in our minds that it is impossible for a free spirit to confine itself in formal and arbitrary metres. William Blake has well said: "Poetry fettered, fetters the human race." Freedom inevitably shows itself in form as well as spirit. Our language is, at best, a limited vehicle for profound and passionate utterance. How much more so, when poetry restricts itself to rhyme! Can we conceive of the theories and subject matter of poets like Shakespeare, Scott and Tennyson, for instance, who embody the principles of feudalism, of caste, of lords and ladies and aristocratic institutions, as appropriate to the ideals of the new order of

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things? These ideals are immense and all-inclusive. Justice, love, the industrial struggle, liberty, the equality of the sexes, comradeship, are some of the themes which engage the modern poet in contrast to silks and perfumes and wars and ladies' eye-brows which were mostly the themes of the past. Do not understand me as attempting to belittle or undervalue the work of the old poets. They expressed their age in an unsurpassed fashion. This is a world of cause and effect. They were effects, the natural outcome of the time in which they lived, just as are the modern poets of revolt. To poets of the old order, the mass of the people, their hopes and aspirations, were non-existent. All heroes were inevitably of the aristocracy. Take Tennyson as an illustration. His poetry breathes the idleness, the traditions, the stately mannerisms, of old England's upper classes, all beautifully done, but with never a word of democracy. Most people to-day accept the old standards of art as final. Is this always to be? Are we always to be fed on ideals which we know have been superseded by larger ideals? Decidedly not. A new world has been born. New demands, new needs for expression of the individual and social life, have come into being. When once the consciousness of this enters and takes possession of us, we infallibly realize that a different standard of literature, and indeed of all the arts, must accompany the change. The psychology of this fact is becoming more and more apparent. Wagner outraged

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tradition. So did Rodin. So did Whitman. And so does Traubel. But because we are unable to classify these first-hand men, because we find it impossible to line them up with anything in the past, are we to deny their undoubted mastership and contribution to the enlargement of life? It seems to me that the great and central idea of modern art is its unique recognition of the divinity of all life. A cosmic spirit pervades the work of the big new poets. Acceptance and toleration, faith and cheer, are its prerequisites. Its verbalism and technique are simple. It uses the speech of every day, of the crowd. Strivings for effect, artificialities of any sort, are invariably absent. I hope I have said enough to prove the connection between the new spirit and the new forms which it naturally creates for itself. And I have tried to indicate some of the revolutionary characteristics to be looked for. Traubel's work embodies these ideals to an extraordinary degree.

VI

As poet

Most of the enemies of Optimos have agreed at least upon one thing—that it is an imitation of Leaves of Grass. Besides being superficial and puerile, this contention proves conclusively to me that such critics are quite as much in the dark about Whitman as about Traubel.

When Edward Carpenter's *Towards Democracy* was published the same charge was made. Walt Whitman was known to have been a tremendous influence in Carpenter's life, just as he was in Traubel's. So, when the book made its appearance, many of the reviewers put it down as a slavish imitation. Written in the free unrhymed style made famous by Leaves of Grass—singing, too, of love and liberty—how was it possible, they said, that *Towards Democracy* could be anything but a disciple's echo of his master? Now Optimos comes forward to meet with the same sort of dissent. I myself take the opposite stand—that is, with those who feel in it a personality distinct from any with which they have hitherto come in contact. I certainly think that the latter perceive both Leaves of Grass and

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Optimos more profoundly than they who do not realize the differences as well as the likenesses between the two books. Walt Whitman was not Traubel's origin, but influenced him, coloring and permeating Optimos like the sunshine filtering through the trees. He has been, and is, a root nourishment as impalpably strong as natural elements. But the brave, strange new book Optimos has a selfhood and individuality which cannot, to the intuitive, be confounded with that of any other. Whitman admits that he was powerfully affected by Ossian, the Bhagavad Gita and Emerson. In the same way Traubel and Carpenter were later affected by Leaves of Grass. All people draw to themselves the things which belong to them.

Optimos has followed Leaves of Grass so closely in point of time that this confusion has naturally resulted. In estimating a new message, certain fundamental truths must be borne in mind—that infinite variety is everywhere found within similar forms, and that all great poetry is necessarily thrown up out of the same deep soil. For instance, we used to have an idea that Christianity was the only religion. It was the one way of truth and life. All other beliefs were not only heathenish, but hopelessly unable to accomplish the salvation of the soul. Now we see that religion is humanity's universal possession, and that all creeds are valuable as indications of progress towards perfection. Underlying the bibles of the East and of the West are the eternal

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things of the spirit which have expressed themselves through such wonderful and versatile forms. Occidental and oriental religions are one in purpose yet richly unique in result, each contributing ideas of its own to the general store.

It is a remarkable fact that wherever we have what we call inspired writers we observe an identity of style and language which is marked in the extreme. The interior spirit chooses its own medium, and this is the reason why men of the loftiest outlook revert to free archaic speech. The channels of inspiration must be left unobstructed. The full heart must have its way. So we find the prophets of old singing in rapt wild notes, and the prophets of to-day—men like Whitman, Traubel and Carpenter—dropping into the same free soaring vocalism. More or less resembling each other in general spread and reach, and inspired by a related faith, *Leaves of Grass* and *Optimos* are alike the utterance of elemental man. Yet their vocabulary is new, superbly fitted for the ears of the future.

Optimos is vividly different from *Leaves of Grass*. Its characteristics are as peculiarly its own as Traubel's temperament is different from Whitman's. Walt foretold new poets, and in Traubel the world possesses one of them. Whitman indicated the vast range of the liberated spirit. He was primarily a philosopher, a mystic, a dreamer. He had an almost oriental attitude and temperament. He was big, slow-moving, phlegmatic. He approached things by

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indirection. He was cautious, serene, poised. He hated disputes. His treatment of some themes was almost impersonally abstract. Traubel, while a philosopher, is basically dynamic. His poems are singularly concrete in their foregrounds and ideal in their issues. They are all entangled with actual experience. His verbalism is the most naive, the most realistic, used by any poet in the English language to-day. *Optimos* is constructively simpler than *Leaves of Grass* and discloses in its author an even wider vocabulary. *Optimos* is philosophy in action, as it were. Like the man, it is direct, child-like and vital. Then it differs from *Leaves of Grass* in its practical sociology. It is the voice of the protest for justice and human rights.

Traubel is impetuous, voluble and insistent. His work partakes of the fighting qualities of his nature. He is absorbed heart and soul in the social struggle. Consequently, there is a certain vehemence in the book which contrasts sharply with the quietism of Whitman. The emotional appeal differs in nature but not in result. *Optimos* is the outcry of a soul that lives in a world of super-consciousness. It says things for itself, and it says things for all. It is a moulding, inspiring force. It reveals the inner law in control of a life. Both Whitman and Traubel belong essentially to the new world, with its modern spirit, its humanism, its religion of every-day. They are the forerunners of poets to come—men and women who, being stirred by the glorious visions

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of a perfect humanity, will translate them into the common language. Traubel has given definite form and outline to many of the vague beautiful dreams of men. He has amplified the ideals of love and comradeship which Whitman left nebulous, and imparted to them earth meanings, speaking with a personal authority which cannot be gainsaid. His individuality is fresh and prophetic.

Leaves of Grass and Optimos are two streams from the same source. Leaves of Grass shows us the world at large. It is law and principle. Optimos shows us many of the figures in the landscape—people as they are actually engaged in the fight for life. It is law in its working clothes. This antithesis is not to be taken too literally, however; for Optimos goes quite as high and deep as Leaves of Grass. I am referring rather to emphasis. Whitman concentrated at one point, Traubel at another. Optimos at once specifies and is the impetus towards a very definite personalism, while all the time having as its background the profoundly mystic insight which makes such an example safe to follow. It is a voice right at our ear. Leaves of Grass and Optimos are brother autobiographies, adding, each one, distinctively, through the most intimate channels, to our knowledge of life and of destiny.

You have got to read Optimos with such things in view. A Canadian writer says of the book: "Not since the appearance of Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass has such a striking book come from the Amer-

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ican press." Traubel's *Chants Communal*, published in Boston in 1904, was promptly received in Germany as an extraordinary contribution to modern literature. In America it was neglected—made nothing of except by a few individuals.

Is the old story to be new again? Is America again to be the last to recognize its own? Here we have a profoundly significant book; the farthest ideals spoken in the nearest words; poems which are scriptural in spirit, yet ultra-modern in form—written in the language of every-day, yet one with eternal principles.

Nowhere in literature is there to be found such a lofty demonstration of art drawn from such a simple vocabulary. This book is a creation, a departure. It is a new signal. There are many to-day, and there will be many more, who will welcome it as the forerunner of that naturalism which must more and more become the medium of all art. *Optimos* in form is not made up higgledy-piggledy of poems about this and that strung together with plenty of rhyme but no reason, but is coherently constructed, grouped, clinched, like a perfect demonstration. Each of the nine clusters of songs expands and reveals the central themes of love and faith.

Out of the wonderful mystic poems in which the spiritual preparations are intimated they broaden into the general life. Songs of joy, liberty, love, comradeship, follow each other in their natural development. Toward the end the loving, trusting soul

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bursts into tremendous paeans to labor, chanting the social struggle, claiming all things for the people.

I feel that women will find a special message in this book. Where else have we had the free woman, the divinely human mother and comrade, sung in such magnificently comprehensive tones? In the group entitled, *To You Going or Coming, O Woman*, a mirror is held up before the face of woman in which she can see herself as she is and as she is bound to become. There are no compliments, there is no belittling persiflage, here—only the strong, virile spirit which helps and inspires woman to the fulfilment of herself. “None of the alabaster-brow, Cinderella-feet business of the poets,” Traubel says, describing his own work.

The book closes with a simple sustained note of affirmation. The last poems sum up experience, tell of struggle and discouragement, but proclaim that all despairs are but steps in the triumphant ascent of the spirit. Death and the grave lose their sting and victory in the presence of so inclusive and so uncompromising a challenge.

VII

As technician

The difference between the old and the new schools of art is necessarily a technical as well as a spiritual one.

I recently read with much interest a column written by a newspaper critic devoted to an appreciation of Alfred Noyes and his poetry. I was particularly struck with the statement that the writer saw in Noyes one of the new poets. It was said that through him the younger race is expressing that which is best and highest in its faith, its aspirations and its ideals. Then, in support of this claim there followed a stanza from Noyes' poem, *The Voices of the Guns*.

I do not believe that the immense modern ideas of life can ever be interpreted by such voices. Or that a cannon ball can ever sing the new tones. No, the poet of the modern world must bring us the voices of the humanities, or he surely belongs with the singers of the past. We now expect from the poet loftier, more spiritual ideals.

In his prophetically beautiful essay on the poet, Emerson says: "O poet! a new nobility is conferred

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in groves and pastures, and not in castles or by the swordblade any longer." And it is true that our ears are attuned these days to something infinitely less noisy, yet infinitely more powerful, than the roar of guns. The cry of brotherhood is the mightiest voice in the world to-day.

All the big new poets are poets of peoples, not poets of coronations and aristocracies and wars. Men like Verhaeren, Whitman, Carpenter, Traubel, have broken loose from the trammels, not only of old techniques, but of old points of view. The critics of the poetic revolt have an idea that the breakaway had simply to do with traditional poetic forms. It is true that the departure is also verbal. But it is not only or chiefly that. It is primarily and vehemently the assumption of a popular as opposed to an aristocratic theory of art. Now, Noyes simply works along old lines. He merely repeats the antique creed. He does nothing which adds anything unique to the already existing poetic output of the world. We are pressing on to a natural, normal literature of an ascendant democracy. The old songs distinguished by the accepted rhymes and the sickening measures of past schools cannot express the inspiration of the modern spirit. Noyes is not to me even an echo. He is already an echo of echoes. He is going back. He is not going ahead. He is a repeater of dead phrases, a master of effete verbal customs.

Traubel has said to me that Robert Ingersoll, in

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speaking to him of poetry just before his death, gave it as his opinion that there would never again be a poet of the first class in our language using the rhymed form and the professional lilt. Ingersoll died in 1899. His prophesy has so far proved true—Noyes and all others, notwithstanding.

I have frequently opened up with Traubel the subject of his technique. "I know what I have tried to do," he says, "but I can't know what I have succeeded in doing."

"What have you tried to do?"

"For one thing I have tried to go the best one better; I have tried to be simpler than the simplest—to present myself absolutely in my common vocabulary."

"How do you mean that? Can you explain it a little more fully?"

"Maybe. I'll try. I lectured on Whitman in Steinert Hall. A man in the audience asked me: 'Do you claim that Emerson and Whitman had no imperfections?' I at once said: 'No, I don't claim that they were perfect. Emerson and Whitman made one big mistake. They seemed to think that a man could not be at the same time an optimist and a propagandist, a passive philosopher and an active revolutionary. I believe it possible for a man to be both.' "

I asked Traubel whether his theory had any witnesses. He smiled. He picked up a copy of *Optimos* and tapped it with his forefinger.

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"I can't say. I have hoped this book was a witness. It was intended to be. I may have missed the mark. That was the intention—to make this book a witness."

Traubel added, along this line, as I questioned him:

"The book belongs to democracy; to the people; to ordinary men and women; to the ideals of the street; to the clamor of revolution. You will find this in its very verbalism—in the play of its speech. I don't mean by this that I may not be subtle. I only mean that I am not sophistical. I don't compete for the professional prizes. I am not interested in the formal rewards. I don't see why the biggest things may not be said in the littlest words. If you will read that section of *Optimos*, in which the woman, the sex, poems are grouped you will see that I go to woman with a new question and come from her with a new answer."

"What question and what answer is that?"

"The question and answer of a final free fertilizing comradeship. Women now sit in some of the parliaments of the world. They sit in the parliament of my book. The woman is there with the man on equal terms without being insulted with the old chivalries."

"Do you mean that you have done all this with a new technique?"

"I don't make such a large claim. I only say that I have tried to keep my text as genuinely immediate

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as the things it undertakes to portray. I have meant to show that it is possible to express the new conclusions in the dialect of the people. I have not only given woman her place and man his place and sex its place and revolution its place, but have also given language its place. I feel that a new alphabet goes along with the new dreams, the new humanities."

He has said to his friends: "Don't set me up too high. Claim too little rather than too much for me. I would rather have a few know me for what I am than many know me for what I am not." These poems are autobiographical. The man and his written word are one and the same thing.

Traubel wrote a poem which he called: You are Going to have a Baby. A big woman greeted it with enthusiasm: "It is the greatest idealist poem in the language." Then Traubel wrote a subsequent poem: And now the Baby is Born. The woman was shocked: "There is evidently a real baby in the poem; it reduces my estimate somewhat." Traubel replied: "There is a real baby in every one of my poems." So there is. Every poem is based upon a life-fact—something very concrete. No matter what it leads to it has this origin. It is this immediateness which singles these poems out as forming a new, invaluable report on life—separates them in a way from all human literature. They are not merely descriptions of things in life. They are life itself; life as understood by a master symbolist and realist.

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Traubel was asked: "Where did you get that word Optimos?" One of his friends, way up in the etymologies of language, wrote him, saying that such a word was impossible. He, too, asked: "Where did you get it?" Traubel tapped his forehead: "Out of here." A learned admiring musician friend said laughing over it: "It was divine impertinence. How did you dare to do it?" Traubel, too, laughed. He said, nonchalantly: "Oh, I don't know; if I don't find the word I want when I want a word I make it." "How can you justify such a process?" He answered: "By making good." He seems to be making good.

Traubel said to me: "Read the poem with that title line Optimos. If you understand the poem you will never again ask the meaning of Optimos." And he also said: "If I can say cosmos, meaning the whole, why shouldn't I say optimos, meaning to speak of the cheerful whole?" That's the point. The Cheerful Whole. This book, every book, all his writings, means "the cheerful whole" as he speaks of it.

As I have said, Traubel's inspiration is instant, drawn out of his personal contact with life. He does not go back to books, borrowing their hoarded substance. He goes forward along with his environment.

He is drastic in his methods. He wishes to arouse, to inspire, to stimulate. He writes out of life seeking for more life. His tone is invariably optimistic. But his is not the blind optimism of one who fails

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to see the tragedies and sorrows of existence. It is the unshakable faith of one who, realizing the incidental shadows and the reasons for a temporal despair, yet sees these mysteries cleared up in the rounded whole. Those singular Collects, which appear each month in *The Conservator*, those rhapsodies of a dreamer, those clamoring melodies of a musician, are not evidences against but for the sanity of his balanced and orbic vision. It is important to say a word as to the technique of these Collects. They are subtly conceived. They are symphonic in form—constructed like the tone poems. The first movement presents the theme with extended various intimations, always in a major affirmative key. Then there is a pause. The second movement is the descent, telling of the temptations and distresses which assail the soul from a lower plane. I call this the minor movement. Here another pause ensues. Then the third and final movement occurs—lifts its triumphant outcry to the heights in words of mundane reassurance and cosmic affirmation. The Collects invariably suggest symphonic music to me. And it is only what could have been expected that Traubel's sensitiveness to color and melody, his close association with musicians, his delight especially in orchestral music (he once loved, he says he now hates, operas) should influence his verbalism in subtle ways. His iconoclasm is no accident.

The records of intimate daily talks with Whitman constitute in their method of treatment an unpre-

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cedented and daring departure from all old theories of biography. While the principle upon which he has here proceeded has brought him much praise, it has likewise opened him to much criticism, but Traubel remains unperturbed. Paul Elmer More calls it "shirt sleeve biography." Traubel himself says: "I'm not interested in making Whitman good or bad: I'm only trying to tell the truth." And he has also said to me: "I don't intend to hide a man's evil and parade his good: I'm going to let the good and evil take care of themselves in the mind of the reader."

He tells how one day in the St. Botolph Club in Boston a group of his friends were discussing with him the first volume, which had just appeared. One man said that the book would be perfect if he had mostly left out the references to Whitman's physical condition—the little daily comments on his health which passed between them as the young fellow entered the bedroom where the disabled poet passed his days and nights. Another of the group immediately spoke up and said he thought the book would be irretrievably injured if those local touches were omitted. But to his taste there was too much literary discussion. He would have some of this eliminated, thinking the book would thereby gain in simplicity and force. So it went around the circle. Everybody objected to something, but no two objected to the same thing. Traubel then said: "You confirm me in my original notion—the logic of my acquiescence

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in the objections would be that there would be no book, for somebody objects to everything."

This incident indicates the stern integrity with which he pursues his purposes. He is unyielding. Not because he is stubborn, but because he is reasonable. He has looked the problem all over and determined its issues. He is not unwilling to change his course, but he cannot be driven. "Being simple, being natural, being myself, is better than being ornate, sophisticated, somebody else," as he puts it.

In his style, Traubel's creative gift has developed something absolutely individual and unique. He is the originator and pioneer of a new school of writing. He has dared to defy tradition. He has set up a new canon of art. His *Collects* and book reviews—in fact, all of his prose writings—are full of brief sentences, which often consist of a single word. He avoids the long, involved statement. He says that writing should be like speech; as close to it as possible. His aim is perfect naturalness, and a simplicity which is almost austere. To gain this, he throws out all ornaments or flimflam which might obscure the meaning and gets right down to the alphabet. His vocabulary is extraordinary in its range. Writers throughout the country are imitating his style. They are boldly making sentences without verbs. They are ejaculating in short crisp periods. They are having less use for the comma.

But there is something more to Traubel's style than punctuation. Speaking of his writing, Traubel

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has said: "The secret of my style is not that it is no style. The secret of my style is that it is my style." His prose flows on like a rushing stream. The many periods are only pebbles on the river-bed. As the current of thought carries the reader along he finds himself unerringly making the pauses required by the meaning. He begins to see that he has been depending a lot on commas and colons and semicolons. It is undoubtedly true that Traubel's much denounced style is no arbitrarily adopted thing, but is the natural adequate expression of himself. It has evolved from his own personality. It is his literary embodiment. In his poems he writes with free, swinging, musical lines. It would be difficult to imagine this man using any other mode of expression. A free nature must utter itself freely. It must be a law unto itself. In the early days he wrote rhymed poems. A few of his friends still insist that they are the best things he has ever done. But how many there are who find their inspiration and delight in the full rhythms of his later free musical cadences.

As I have said, the wonderfully beautiful and inspiring Collects are symphonic in form. They are composed of three movements, musical in treatment and feeling. No doubt their motives, submotives, recurrences and climaxes would make an impressive tone-effect if it were possible to give their musical equivalents. It would take all the resources of an orchestra to do it. Each movement is opened by the

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theme, which is invariably a sentence pregnant with wisdom—some phase of life's problem whose discussion will arouse and help. Sometimes it is a ringing affirmation, such as "I'm so glad I was born"; or again it takes the form of a question like the following, which itches at your ears for an answer: "What are you trying to get out of life?" This extract from *I'm so Glad I was Born* demonstrates clearly the musical rhythm of which I speak:

I'm so glad I was born. It seemed so right for me to come. And some day it will seem just right for me to go. Maybe not just yet but some time. I don't know whether it matters much which side of mystery God feeds me on. I am fed. Here or there, nowhere or anywhere, I am joyous, a part of things, not to be skipped—an atom but for which the stars would not hold together. That's enough for any sane man to know about himself. Yet that's not all I know about myself. I know God made no mistake making me. Or making you, either. Saint or scoundrel, making anybody. I can see other things put aside for my entrance. The Lord said: Give him a show. So I was piloted to this earthstar.

So much for the form of his art. And right here many of its reviewers and commentators stop short. They have been so shocked, so repelled, so puzzled, by this utter disregard of time-honored usage that they rarely get at what Traubel has to say. His way of saying it is all that they can attend to. If they waited long enough to really read and understand him perhaps they would join his appreciators in welcoming a message startling in its significance and fervor.

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His style has its normal reasons for being. He may not acquiesce in inherited prejudices of construction, but he unerringly proceeds according to a temperamental law. He is self-consistent as an artist—is peculiarly susceptible, in spite of his academic enemies, to fine distinctions of normal rhythm and form. His aim in art as in life is to draw and keep as close to what is first hand as possible. He is an artistic and spiritual democrat—the voice of the passions and prejudices and aspirations of man as a whole, not men in classes. For this reason he vigorously discards “all merely dictionary words,” as he says, with the result that his text is probably more nearly vernacular than that of any writer in the English speaking world to-day. It may be asked, then, why Traubel, like Whitman, fails to appeal instantly to the average reader? How does it come that if he is really speaking the common tongue, he is not understood and recognized? The answer seems to be this—that the more universal and subjective a man’s work is, the longer it takes the objective individual to come into personal possession of it. The poet and artist, when genuinely informed, is one with humanity and in advance of it.

Any review of Traubel’s work which failed to emphasize his vital connection with the social struggle would indeed be inadequate. For in his interest in economics and his passionate espousal of the great labor cause are to be found the practical fruit of his ideality. He embodies the passive as

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well as the active—rhapsody and soaring contemplation as well as the solid earth and uncompromising deeds. He fits in equally with barricades and dreams.

VIII

As revolutionist

To some, Traubel makes his strongest appeal through the transcendentalism of his work. To others, through his passion for social justice. Many readers on the other hand give their greatest approval to his remarkable book reviews. In them one gets the full force of his social philosophy from a different angle. It is direct, concrete, unqualifying in its principles and ideals. Traubel is a dreamer, a seer, and at the same time a revolutionary who is intensely alive on all sides of his being to the realities and facts of life.

Not long ago Maxim Gorky, in speaking of present day literature, wrote the following paragraph: "Horace Traubel, Wells, Anatole France and Maeterlinck, all these having started with individualism and quietism, are unanimously coming over to Socialism, to the doctrine of activity. They are all calling loudly to man to merge himself into mankind."

Horace Traubel has planted his flag of brotherhood, love and justice in the very thick of the industrial fight. The labor movement, that mightiest

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recognition of the divinity of man the world has ever seen, has its interpreters, its recorders, in all branches of art. Some of the finest creative genius of the day the world over is at work immortalizing this gigantic struggle in statues of marble and bronze. Great democratic songs and paintings owe their existence to its vast human inspiration. Traubel is doing with his pen what the sculptor is doing with his chisel and the painter with his brush. He is helping to write the labor scripture of the world. These titles, taken from the labor poems in *Optimos*, are in themselves masterpieces of suggestion: The People are the Masters of Life—The People, The People; Come, O you pinched starved Outcasts; I Hear the Laugh of the Unfed Children; The Breadline trails its Clouded Way into my Sunny Heart; Keep to the Road, dear Children; The Priest has his Temple, I have my Store, said the Merchant. A German critic makes this interesting comment on Whitman and Traubel: "Traubel, who comes of German parentage, was Whitman's disciple and friend, and in point of form he is strongly dependent on him; in matter, however, he goes beyond him. The master had social ideas without being a Socialist; the younger man is the outspoken advocate and herald of Communism."

In *Chants Communal*, and in the labor section of *Optimos*, we have some of the most magnificent poetry which has ever accompanied an historic movement of thought. These songs may well be

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termed scriptural. They are the very heartbeat of humanity. Such powerful exhortations, such fiercely tender pleadings, are in them. They are religious in the broadest, deepest sense. Every one of them is a call to the higher self in man; is instinct with the consciousness of the sacredness of life in its human everyday aspects. What hatred for shams, for injustice—what devotion to freedom, to love—flames in these writings. What an insistent cry for the recognition of the individual, for the most inclusive claims of humanism, sounds throughout these impassioned lines. Listen to this, taken from the first song in *Chants Communal*:

Forever first of all is justice. Is love. Not the food you eat. Not the clothes you wear. Not the luxuries you enjoy. But justice. Everything must stand aside for justice. You have a trade and you think your trade comes before justice. You are a man of business and you think that business comes before justice. Yes before love. You practice a profession. Your profession comes before justice. Fatal fallacy. Justice stands first. Justice precedes all the witnesses of life. Justice is the only final witness to life. You may satisfy every other claim. But nothing is done for life until justice is satisfied.

Traubel has published four volumes which illustrate the amazing scope and grasp of his intellect. And yet there are three other possible books to be made from printed but neglected material, no one trespassing on the field of the other—one from his brilliant reviews, one from his dramatic criticisms, and one from his *Collects*, those wonderful scrip-

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tural pieces which voice the intimate optimism of Traubel's forecasts. The short strikingly original prose chants comprising *Chants Communal*, were written for *The Worker*, a New York Socialist weekly paper, which went out of existence upon the appearance of the daily *Call*. This volume was translated into German in 1907 by Dr. Otto Lessing and appeared under the imprint of Piper (München). It is the spiritual expression of the demand for economic freedom. Traubel is a Communist. It may be noted that in *Chants Communal* he never mentions specific Socialism. Although he is a member of the Socialist party and works heartily with it, he says laughingly to Socialists: "You are still conservative for me, though perfect as far as you go." Debs, Jack London, Gorky, Herron, Walling, Rose Pastor Stokes, such revolutionaries the world over, alive with the awakening spirit, realize his genius and grasp the significance of his message. He and Debs are great personal friends. In fact, Traubel is intimately next most of the men and women through whom the propaganda fulfilling the anti-profit idealism is to-day getting its direction.

One of the poems in *Optimos* is addressed to Debs. A well known writer and worker in the party recently remarked that he considers that Traubel embodies the psychology of the movement better than any writing man living or dead. Peter Burrowes said of *Chants Communal*: "It contains more quotable, more efficiently inspirational lines, than any

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book I know, not even excepting the Bible." However that may be, the fact remains that his work and friendship are perennial sources of inspiration to the men and women engaged in the fight for economic freedom.

Optimos and Chants Communal are labor bibles. Those who are once initiated into their potent spiritual atmosphere find them to be a very gospel of illumination and reassurance. Traubel has watched the Socialist movement grow from a tiny acorn into the mighty oak it is to-day. When the history of the nineteenth-twentieth century comes to be written, his name will be quoted as one of the great futurists, while he will still remain a contemporary of generations yet unborn. His foreknowledge and forewisdom are equally tremendous and electrifying. He has sphered and apprehended the social order of the coming civilization. As I have said, his part in the social struggle is as a spokesman of those fecundating moral and spiritual ideals which underlie the revolution. You will not find the technical language of Socialism in *The Conservator*, but you will find—and this is especially true of his flashing, flaming book reviews, which are rather revelations than echoes or resumes; that the modern problems are discussed and analyzed by him from a center which conjoins economics—a revolutionary program, with the farthest extensions, the substantially ultimate horizons, of emotional hunger and speculation.

Alexander Irvine calls Traubel "The psalmist of

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democracy." Optimos presents in itself a rare combination of those temporal and eternal qualities which both hasten and delay the arrival of a book. It seems to have emerged from far backgrounds of experience, and yet to pulsate intensely with the life of to-day. It belongs by right to all revolutionaries, for it sings the songs and voices the ideals of change.

When it is once realized that these poems are scriptural in their presentation of social issues, they will almost certainly everywhere be used by fighters for freedom as a source of inspiration and guidance. For here at our door we have the libertarian spirit of our times embodied in songs whose foundations are everlasting. A new comprehensive philosophy of life is inherent in them. They have proceeded from a consciousness other than that of the usual individual. They appear to me to be the confessions of a man whose life has been lived in obedience to an inner law, relating itself to the outer world in a fresh, unique way. You get the very urge and swing of life's struggle in a poem such as *Keep to the Road, Dear Children*; or, *The People are the Masters of Life*; or *I hear the Laugh of the Unfed Children*. All these poems came right out of the concrete. They are the marching hymns of emancipating forces. Traubel has many interesting things to tell of the origins of the poems. Sometimes he can be persuaded to talk intimately about them. He says, that they were almost, without exception,

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suggested by actual incidents—that they were born directly out of the people. For instance, after standing one night watching the long line of hungry men wait their turn at Fleischmann's, he wrote: "The breadline trails its clouded way into my sunny heart." The pathos, the cruelty, the blackness has been set down in words of poignant beauty. All through the book is felt the passionate love for humanity, the unshakable faith in the sure triumph of justice, which are the invariable characteristics of his work. He loves to go about in the crowd drawing from them inspiration and cheer. The poem which perhaps as much as any conveys the sense of oneness with the life of the streets begins as follows:

I love to go among my dear comrades the people,
Loafing in streets with my spirit alert and approving,
Not afraid to admit the bad with the good or losing faith
 when evil brags and blasphemes,
Giving my whole self for the whole self of the crowd,
Withholding nothing from the free interchange of the
 hours,

Liberal with life as the crowd is liberal with life,
In the sacred stream without question of precedence com-
mingling . . .

The mad sea tosses—the sea of my comrades:

And we call our hellos to each other from the crests of
 waves,

And the streets teem with the millions of us no better or
 worse,

And the houses, the silent houses each side, regard us with
 their dumb looks,

And we give the great city its life or it has no life—

Yes, give it its justifying meaning or it has no meaning:

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Lift it all upon our shoulders to mountainous wonder,
And suffer and die to keep it aloft as a banner signaling
the farther dreams.

Then there is that big triumphant chant which he calls The People are the Masters of Life. How it swells like a mighty shout proclaiming the divine rights of man! This lover of children does not forget the dreadful part, they, too, play in the labor drama. He shows us the fate of these helpless, tender bits of humanity under the crushing remorseless system.

Would you go to the courts of the poor, to pick roses?
Nobody but death picks roses in the courts—the roses, the children:

He takes the most beautiful, he spares but few—

The court is the sentence of the poor.

And the mothers, O the mothers, who gave the roses to the world,

Who shall speak for them the protest that faints on their lips?

The hearse passes along the fetid alley, the flowers are picked with stern hand and tossed into it, the wheels are again started:

We hear the rumble of the wagon as it turns the corner of the street and is gone.

The toy of the child of the court is death:

See, the child learns too well the lesson of its heritage:
the child does not forget:

In its heart is revolution!

Could the spiritual purposes and contentions of Socialism have a clearer poetic statement than the following:

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What does it mean to have right of way?

It means eclipse and sunburst, burial and resurrection,

It means universal fulfillment, man in his heart as the seed
in the ground,

It means to achieve loyalty through rebellion, peace through
pain,

It means to sign no single power away, not to accept
obedience,

It means to give tyrants everywhere notice to quit,

It means to take all titles of nobility from purses and
rent rolls,

It means that mouths shall go unfed only when no one has
food, backs go uncovered to the cold only in the gen-
eral nakedness.

These are only a few extracts chosen at random from the eighth group in the book. The whole section is significant, and because it is so gloriously expressive of that ideal which is the mainspring of the labor movement, I feel it to be a scriptural and inspirational asset which Socialists cannot afford to overlook.

A great many critics of Socialism fail utterly to realize its essentially religious nature. They do not see that the profoundest laws of life are involved in its teaching. I think if such people could read Optimos understandingly, they would get a new vision of this spirit which is flaming in the hearts of men. Desire for union, for brotherhood, for the fulfillment of life, is the necessity which has laid hold of us and is expressing itself in the fight to make a heaven right here on earth as nearly as lies within human power. But unfortunately, people who do

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not recognize the spiritual forces at work in Socialism—who can see God in prayers and creeds but not in a movement which demands such coarse material things as bread and butter for those who earn them; such people, I fear, are hopelessly out of touch with a book like *Optimos* before they have even opened its covers. Whether we take the labor poems, or the mystic poems, or those dedicated to woman, or those which sing of comradeship and love, we discover that the individual has established new terms with God. Out of that intimate relationship, that spiritual democracy, which sees created and creator as equals and brothers, springs a living something that permeates every line of this book. God is moving evolving life as spoken of here. We feel God seeking and finding utterance in these vital yearning words which reveal so many widened avenues of experience.

During the recent great strike in England, The Archbishop of Canterbury offered up a prayer which was a perfect epitome of the church's helplessness in the presence of the labor question. It called on God to promote the spirit of brotherhood, but made no plea for justice, for the righting of terrible social wrongs. The actual religious leaders of the twentieth century are men like Traubel, Debs and other prophets of the new social order. It is to them that we must look for adequate inspiration, for they preach the great modern religion of democracy, which takes into account all sides of man's being and

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recognizes its total right to fulfillment. A book like *Optimos* is surely and truly a bible, for it adds something new to our knowledge of life and of the illimitable soul of man.

It is interesting to observe the impression which certain radical thinkers are making upon the intellectual world—Shaw and Wells, for example—and then, after reading Traubel, to wonder how it is that a man whose work contains all that they ever said and more, much more, is still a stranger to his own country, to say nothing of the world at large. It seems to me that it is the unusual blend of mystic and revolutionist in Traubel which prevents him, in contrast to Shaw and such men, from gaining immediate acceptance. Shaw does the work of his time, Traubel that of all time as well. In connection with this idea, I came to the same conclusion recently while reading Ellen Key's remarkable book, *Love and Marriage*. In it she outlines the new morality which she feels is to replace the old and lower standards as we grow more enlightened and civilized. Now, the ideals on which such books as Shaw's, Brieux's, Key's, and much of the advanced literature of the day, are based, I find already naturally a part of the consciousness which produced *Optimos*. All its poems seem to have issued from a conception of life in which these thoughts are already foregone conclusions. It is as if Traubel's spirit had long ago made this new revolutionary code of action its own, and as if *Optimos* was its direct

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illuminating voice. In other words, the dreamer's vision, coupled with the revolutionary's spirit, has enabled him to travel to the outposts of philosophy and science and beyond. He has the cosmic insight and communal passion which carry an attack on the present order of things out of the clouds into the realm of accomplished reality. Besides being a revolutionist, he is spiritually inspirational in the widest sense of the word.

The early poems and prose were largely mystic in nature, but what may be called the second period of his literary growth, came with his increasing interest in the espousal of the great cause of industrial freedom. Consequently we find a simpler verbalism, a surer technique, a cumulative power, in each succeeding group. The very height and glory of his unique genius is reached, first when he sings of labor, and second when, in closing his book, he utters his unqualifying cosmical reassurances.

IX

As prophet

In everything Traubel writes one quality stands out pre-eminently—that rare blending of the real and the ideal which so unmistakably distinguishes the work of the modern masters. In his poems, his Collects, his book pieces, his talks with Whitman, you feel the impetus and interplay of a nature cosmic in its vision and universal in its sympathies. Traubel is one of those who predicate the sacredness of human life. His philosophy is orbic, taking in all sides of man's being. He has devoted himself to the propagation of ideas and ideals making for freedom. This love for the people, this unswerving allegiance to principles, has given his social activities, extending over a long period of years, a singular continuity and significance. The best confirmation of Traubel has always been in his steadfast refusal to be bribed out of his course. He has rejected many tempting offers that have come to him from time to time from publishers of newspapers and magazines, fearing that they would interfere with his unqualified tasks. The desire to help set free the tides of comradeship and cheer envelops all

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he says and does, visibly and invisibly. The humanities are his first care, technique his last. He dares to be absolutely himself, independently of schools or traditions. His writing is the extraordinary output of a consecrated personality whose instincts know no pretence or falsehood or shame.

Few writers so absolutely live and breathe in their words. It takes a man of uncommon insight to understand the glories of the common man. Horace Traubel, having the seer's vision, announces with unquestioning faith what, to the ordinary mind, seems novel and impossible pathways for the pilgrimage of the race. But those mystical leads will be found of all lures to be in the end the most vividly clarifying and practical. The love and hope which he never tires singing of will manifest itself in just that elevated unsophisticated spirit which his free nature demands and manifests. He does not have to depart from the humblest incidents of life for his inspiration. You have to remember that Traubel does not study the life of the people from the outside. He is no slummer—no looker through keyholes, no interloping savior. He is one of the crowd himself—mixes with the crowd without ostentation and is at once accepted by the crowd as one of the crowd. If you watch him among men, it instantly dawns on you that he is at home with democracy—that democracy with him is not intellectual or a pose but the sinew and impulse of his daily behavior. All the little happenings of the

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average, all the inconsequent dreams of the so-called mob, are transmuted through his brooding heart and soul into vital experience, which reveals the underlying motives of individual conduct. I have gone over the poems in *Optimos* with Traubel. I find that in almost every case they have a direct inspiration. He is not cobwebbed or cloudmade. He is born out of immediate experience.

Of all living writers who are ranked among the progressives, the mystics, the revolutionaries, not one has surpassed Traubel in the courage of his foreshadowings of the ideal man. Take the sex problem. He has issued its boldest, its farthest reaching, challenge—he has tried to make unmitigatedly plain what it implies to be a free responsible man or woman. He has elaborately discussed Ellen Key, Brioux, David Graham Phillips and others, and has gone farther than any of them in construing sex—has comprehended their inmost import and then cut way below them.

Traubel is picturesque and dramatic, tender and masterful, in his treatment of this or any other theme when he lets himself go. His religion makes orthodoxy look pale and bloodless. His worship of the essential is fervent and consuming. Faith in the immanence of God, in the beneficence of the universe, permeates every line of his constructive teachings. Behind all his writing, there exists, then, a definite consistent philosophy, of which the unceasing flow of words is the inspired result. Traubel

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is a mystic. He is as sure as all that has been and sees as far as all that is to be. His spontaneity and vitality come from his ardent self-realization, which is so unquestionably profound. Everything he says is virile, uncompromising and downright, just like the man himself. He puts himself into his work without professional reserves. "I have no dignities to put on and off like clothes" he says; "It keeps me busy trying to be on the square"; and he adds: "I mean on the square with myself; that's what I mean."

The blood and spirit of a man is always foremost in what he says and does. You are never disturbed by the suspicion that he is manufacturing anything or is playing the game. He aims to have his verbalism as simple as its origins, and its origins are always the people. An art that is removed from the realm of everyday, from first causes, meets with his instinctive distrust.

The two maternity poems in *Optimos* have called forth opinions as far apart as the poles. One critic, a distinguished editor, said: "If you want to see the logical conclusion of Whitmanism read the maternity poems in *The Conservator*." A brilliant young American novelist wrote this to Traubel: "I would have *You are Going to Have a Baby and Now the Baby is Born* printed and bound in vellum and placed in the hands of every woman that loves a man." For those who imagine they have to search somewhere outside of men and women for the ideal,

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Traubel's work will have no value whatever. But for those who are moved by what is ultra modern and adventurous, who believe the universe is not upside down, this man's utterances will come to have scriptural verity. He shocks you with his brutal frankness, and at the same moment opens your eyes to a viewpoint which is as enlightened as it is daring. Traubel's moral world is built up on intense individualism which yet is maintained solely through the law of the common good. In spite of an almost fiercely dynamic personality, so different from all others, and so dazzling often, he is not set apart by it from the simple come and go of the crowd. He is at once the atomic self-centered man and the drop lost in the ocean. He sees everything in communal perspectives. It remains for the future to put the sign and seal of final authenticity on his life. But some of us who have been privileged to come close to the man's product, and his unpublished career, are ready with a verdict to-day. He seems to us an intellectual and spiritual giant—a man who is bound to come to his own when the thoughts and ideals for which he stands are more widely heralded and understood. In revolutionary America, Germany and England, Traubel's is a familiar name. He is quoted everywhere. Here in America he is in constant personal association with the eminent protagonists of revolt.

It was of course to have been expected that he would meet with no instant hospitality at the hands

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of formal or academic criticism. But a knowledge of the response which his writings, especially his poems, call forth from men and women known and unknown in every quarter of the globe, is curiously convincing—at first may seem unbelievable. He speaks straight to you and me as a comrade to a comrade, and literally thousands of gratefully appreciative letters addressed to him by his known and unknown friends bring him a recognition which he prizes more highly than the applause of the schools.

Traubel's paper and his books have imposed a sort of priestly function upon him. He is an insatiable correspondent. He writes every letter with his own hand. He is a great buoyer up of those in trouble—is indefatigable in his resolute optimism. Hundreds of people could tell how, in times of doubt and distress, all of a sudden, they would commence to receive daily notes from him which would continue until they were out of danger again. He is as a man, as well as in his written word, a steadier and curer of souls.

The Conservator was started in Whitman's lifetime. One of its purposes was to enlighten the world as to the philosophy, for which Whitman stood. But George D. Herron has said something in this connection, upon which too much emphasis cannot be placed. "A whole new world has been born since Whitman's days and Traubel is of this new world. Whitman himself would be the first to recognize this. Traubel walks in the light of a

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social vision which had not broken upon man even when Whitman went out into the larger quest. Besides, it is given unto few, as the generations come and go, to consistently and with such a divine stubbornness follow a vision from year to year, as Traubel has followed it, and to give to it such mastery and music and permanence of expression." It is always to be understood that Traubel's individuality is quite as remarkable as that of the men who preceded him in the historic line. Emerson, Hugo, Tolstoy, Whitman—none of them were more surely based on their own feet. Yet Traubel himself has always said to me: "Say what you please about all that, but always say also that I have emerged from the crowd and go back to it—that but for the crowd my individuality would have no meaning."

Traubel's enemies have harped upon his relations with Whitman until it might be supposed that he was a mere reflector of Whitman ideas. As a matter of fact, he is quite as sharply himself as Whitman was. He has touched life on even more sides. He has worked in trades and professions and come up against even the formal culture of the age in more than one way. For instance, he not only writes but works with his hands. He has for years made up the forms of *The Conservator* and often sets the type of entire issues. He is an active practical spirit in social agitation. He makes speeches to little revolutionary groups. And yet, as I have said before, though a partisan hot for rebellion, he is also a

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philosopher, serenely confident of the cosmic good will. He sees the black in life, but does not believe that life is black or that its issue can possibly be disaster. Let me repeat that his Steinert Hall retort in effect expressed or described his personal evolution, though he may have had no idea of it himself. An American writer spoke of his poem to Fritz Scheel as "perhaps the finest elegy in the English language." I have had access to some of Traubel's personal papers and find such ec-miums quite more common than even I suspected. If his correspondence could be quoted, people who to-day discredit him would be astonished at what has gone on underground concerning him through the long period of his comparative obscurat-ion.

For twenty-three years now, in his office in Philadelphia, Horace Traubel has been editing his remarkable paper *The Conservator*. The expressed opinion of many advanced thinkers is that there is no other paper in America which stands on so high a plane and is such an inspiration. Edmund Clarence Stedman said: "The time will come when files of *The Conservator* will be fought for and be as precious as the files of *The Dial* and *The Germ*." In it each month appear a Collect and a poem from his pen, as well as book reviews and occasional dramatic criticisms. What is the ideal underlying all his work? What is the message he delivers? He is a great mystic; a man possessed of a vision—a vision of the unity of all life and of the divine

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reality of our relationship with each other. A Canadian writer has recently called him "one of the greatest preachers of the age." It is the profoundly mystical element in his work which has caused Frank Putman to see in him "America's supreme symbolist." His life is devoted to the realization of that great dream shared by all men of faith and vision. Perhaps it has been given to him to see more clearly than most the coming of the brotherhood of man. Perhaps that is why he goes his way singing of it with joy, whether the world listens or not, for he knows that the reign of love is inevitable, and he speaks for the inarticulate. In the following verse from *Optimos* the poet shows that a free society can only be composed of free individuals, who in being true to themselves are true to society:

Have you been faithful dear brother?

I do not ask whether you have been faithful to the laws,

I do not ask whether you have been faithful to constitutions or creeds,

I do not ask whether you have been faithful to the line of life marked out for you by any other,

I ask whether you have been faithful to yourself,

I ask whether you have been faithful to that self your self which gives its faith to man in the largest service.

I do not call any roll for you my brother,

I expect you to call the roll for yourself.

The best questions and answers of the soul are always to itself.

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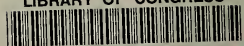
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